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## House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. HARDY).

### DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,  
March 18, 2015.

I hereby appoint the Honorable CRESENT HARDY to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,  
*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

### MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 6, 2015, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

### GAZA'S WATER SHORTAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, amidst the troubling picture coming out of the Israeli elections, there was some good news from the Middle East for a change. The Israeli Government announced that it would double the amount of water it sells to Gaza from 5 million to 10 million cubic meters annually. This is positive momentum we must build upon because, while it is an important step, the quantity is insuffi-

cient to prevent a humanitarian disaster looming for Gaza and the region.

The tunnels that were dug by Hamas from Gaza into Israel were not the only things underground that should generate public concern. Without rapid action, the drinking water beneath Gaza, or the lack thereof, poses a threat to the region that is as severe or worse than Hamas' tunnels. That is because the coastal aquifer, the only source of drinking water for 1.8 million Gazans, is near collapse, as soon as 2016.

Like the cities of Los Angeles or Tel Aviv, Gaza cannot currently meet its water needs from within its boundaries. That dynamic is compounded by the fact that Gaza's population is rapidly increasing and now consumes three times the amount of water that is naturally replenished from rainwater.

The massive amount of water withdrawn from the aquifer over the last several decades has allowed salty Mediterranean seawater to contaminate the drinking water at an ever-increasing rate. A 2012 United Nations report said that 90 percent of the coastal aquifer salinity levels were too great for drinking purposes. Today that figure is 95 percent. By the end of 2016, the entire aquifer will be unfit for human consumption. And unless action is taken, by 2020, that damage will be irreversible.

To make matters worse, Gaza does not have large and modern sewage treatment plants and operations. The sewage from 1.8 million Gazans further pollutes the groundwater and risks the outbreak of pandemic diseases like cholera and typhoid. Sewage remains untreated as 90,000 cubic meters of raw sewage, flows into the Mediterranean every day.

Israeli intelligence knew about and warned about Hamas' tunnels long before they were used, but Israeli politicians chose not to take their counsel.

Environmental and water experts have been warning for many years

about the imminent collapse of Gaza's coastal aquifer, but too many politicians everywhere have failed to respond.

While we don't want to minimize Israel's important move to authorize additional water into Gaza, we shouldn't overstate its impact in averting the region's looming water crisis.

What is going to happen if thousands of Gazans actually rush to the fences, trying to get to Egypt or Israel for water? What happens if the water crisis broadens the appeal of Hamas' malice in Gaza?

Look at the recent history in Syria, where the collapse of civil order and the civil war was precipitated by persistent drought that drove people from the countryside into the city. Such dire outcomes in Gaza could be avoided if additional and immediate long-term measures were employed.

Based on the existing infrastructure, Israel has the potential to double—overnight—the quantity of water supplied to Gaza. A wastewater treatment plant recently built under the management of the World Bank in Gaza could reduce by a third the amount of untreated wastewater that pollutes both the groundwater and the beaches of Israel and Gaza.

It is clearly in Israel's interest to facilitate the private-public partnerships that lead to greater energy independence and assist the Palestinian Water Authority.

Strengthening the Palestinian Authority by increasing the flow of water into Gaza and dealing with the sanitation crisis weakens Hamas and highlights their inability to provide public services.

Last night's election was deeply troubling for the future of Israeli politics and a two-state solution, long the policy of the United States and, until recently, the leadership of Israel.

But taking action on water and sanitation is a small, critical, important

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g.,  1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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